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homemakers' chat

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U. S DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE

Wednesday, November 5, 1941

SUBJECT: "Grade-Labeled Canned Goods." Information from the Agricultural Marketing Service, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

--ooOoo--

Today I want to talk with you about the new U. S. grade-labeled canned fruits and vegetables-- the canned foods that are packed under the continuous inspection of the U. S. Department of Agriculture. Maybe I shouldn't call them new for they have been on the market for a couple of years. Still, I'm sure they are new to most of you-- because this is the first year that many stores will feature fruits and vegetables canned under continuous Government inspection.

I'm sure these U. S. ABC grade-labels are something you will want to know about-- for if yours is an average family, you spend quite a lot for canned food. And grade-labels should help you to spend this part of your food money to better advantage.

First of all, you probably would like to know what the U. S. grades mean that you'll find on canned fruits and vegetables. The highest grade is U. S. Grade A or Fancy. This grade, by official standards, can only be used on top quality canned fruits and vegetables. That means the produce packed in the can has to rate "ace high" in color, size, tenderness, and it can have only a few, if any, blemishes.

Second on this U. S. quality grade scale is U. S. Grade B or Choice. Canned fruits and vegetables rating U. S. Grade B are very high in quality-- high enough for most uses. But fruit and vegetables in U. S. Grade B are a little lower than those in U. S. Grade A in at least one of the scoring points. The color may not be quite so uniformly good, or perhaps a little less tender.

Then comes U. S. Grade C or standard, and of course this grade is a little lower than U. S. Grade B. It's a good, wholesome product, however. It may not be quite so uniform in color, or size, or maybe the produce wasn't picked at its very best, there may be a few more blemishes. But-- and this is important-- it is indeed a standard product, good enough for average use. If your food budget is limited you may want to buy mostly Grade C canned fruit and vegetables. You'll get a wholesome, nutritious and palatable food. But because it does not look quite so good, it will likely cost less than higher qualities. Even if your income is fairly high, you probably will want to buy Grade C for some dishes-- those when appearance counts less.

Some of you may wonder what difference there is between U. S. Grade A and just plain Grade A-- a good many stores are carrying cans with the plain type of ABC grade-label, so you will likely see them. There really isn't any difference between the standards for these two types of ABC grades. Grade A stands for the same quality whether U. S. is printed in front of the grade letter or not. And the same is true for Grades B and C.

That being the case, you probably want to know how the "U. S." gets on some cans and not on the others and why. Some folks think women aren't interested in such details, but I think you are-- and, too, I think it's best to be interested in the how's and why's of food marketing.

"U. S." can only be used with the grade letter if the can was packed under the continuous inspection service of the U. S. Department of Agriculture. The contents of the cans are graded in the cannery for quality, by the inspectors from the Department's Marketing Service. Every plant with this inspection service must maintain high sanitary standards. The canneries must have excellent sanitation or they can't have the service. Housekeeping in these plants is as good as you could want it in your own kitchen. Every step of the processing is inspected.

Next, I suppose you wonder how much the inspection service costs and who

pays for it. The cost is really low. At present it's between 1/4 and 1/3 cent per case of two dozen cans. The owners of the plants with the service pay the cost-- that is the inspectors' salaries, the overhead cost and any incidental expense.

As to the price you pay for these cans in your local store-- no absolute answer can be given-- any more than it can about the price for other canned fruits and vegetables. The price of canned food is not controlled by the government. Usually, however, the cost is lower as the grade is lower-- that is-- a Grade C product costs less than Grade A of the same product put out by the same canner or distributor-- and that's logical. For when you want the highest quality in any type of goods-- canned food, shoes, furniture-- you are willing to pay more than when you buy a lower quality of the same item. What you pay for any one can, however, depends on too many things to set up a hard and fast rule. The point in favor of the inspected and grade-labeled cans-- as far as price goes-- is that you can know without any doubt what quality is within the can. And once you're absolutely sure of the quality and that the product is wholesome, then you can figure out what the product is worth to you.

If, for example, a certain can of asparagus is marked U. S. Grade A, and you want high quality and can afford to pay for it, you will probably buy it. If, on the other hand, you can't afford this highest quality in the canned asparagus, you might find that U. S. Grade C will be all right for your purpose and that it'll cost much less. Sometimes, though, you may not be able to find all grades of the same product within one store. For even now, there aren't enough of the U. S. grade-labeled cans for all stores to have all grades in all products. Then, perhaps, you will change your menu a bit and decide to have U. S. Grade A in a cheaper vegetable. Perhaps you'll find-- after checking of course-- that U. S. Grade A in canned snap beans will be a good substitute.

As you visit your local market, look for canned fruits and vegetables which have on the labels U. S. Grade A-- U. S. Grade B or U. S. Grade C; or just plain Grade A, B, or C. These labels will help you get the quality food you want, and provide you with an excellent means of comparing prices.

